

Constitution vs Guerriere



Constitution and Guerriere at battle.

A frigate sighted on 19 August was determined to be HMS *Guerriere*, with the words "Not The Little Belt" painted on her foretopsail *Guerriere* opened fire upon entering range of *Constitution*, doing little damage. After a few exchanges of cannon fire between the ships Captain Hull maneuvered into an advantageous position and brought *Constitution* to within 25 yards (23 m) of *Guerriere*. He then ordered a full double-loaded broadside of grape and round shot fired, which took out *Guerriere*'s mizzenmast. With her mizzenmast dragging in the water, *Guerriere*'s maneuverability decreased and she collided with *Constitution*; her bowsprit becoming entangled in *Constitution*'s mizzen rigging. This left only *Guerriere*'s bow guns capable of effective fire. Hull's cabin caught fire from the shots, but the fire was quickly extinguished. With the ships locked together, both Captains ordered boarding parties into action, but due to heavy seas neither party was able to board the opposing ship.

At one point the two ships rotated together counter-clockwise, with *Constitution* continuing to fire broadsides. When the two ships pulled apart, the force of the bowsprit's extraction sent shock waves through *Guerriere*'s rigging. Her foremast soon collapsed, and that brought the mainmast down shortly afterward. *Guerriere* was now a dismasted, unmanageable hulk, with close to a third of her crew wounded or killed, while *Constitution* remained largely intact. The British surrendered.

Using his heavier broadsides and his ship's sailing ability, Hull had managed to surprise the British. Adding to their astonishment, many of their shot rebounded harmlessly off *Constitution*'s hull. An American sailor reportedly exclaimed "Huzzah! her sides are made of iron!" and *Constitution* acquired the nickname "Old Ironsides".

The battle left *Guerriere* so badly damaged that she was not worth towing to port. The next morning, after transferring the British prisoners onto the *Constitution*, Hull ordered *Guerriere* burned. Arriving back in Boston on 30 August, Hull and his crew found that news of their victory had spread fast, and they were hailed as heroes.